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Difficulties faced by freshmen in accomplishing the study-reading needed for a required world history course at Hofstra University led to the establishment of a 3-credit 1-semester reading and study skills course, developed by an interdisciplinary team composed of members from the history and reading faculties. Thirty students were assigned to two sections of the history-reading course for the fall semester, and thirty for the spring semester. Each history-reading section was composed of 30 students, 15 of whom took both history and reading, and 15 of whom took only history. History text materials were used in the reading sections, and emphasis was placed on survey skills, paragraph analysis, use of signals and other cues, critical analysis and evaluation, analysis of structural and organizational patterns, and note taking. Achievement was measured by the Cooperative English Test (CET), C-2, Reading Comprehension, an informal history-reading inventory, and a comparison of history grades. Those students taking reading and history together scored 16 percentile points higher on the CET than those enrolled only in history, but no significant difference among the final history grades was noted. References are included. (MD)

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An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching Reading

In May 1967, the following letter was mailed to all entering freshmen at Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York: (1) (It should be noted that it was written by Professor Linton Thorn, Assistant Professor of History, and a former Rhodes Scholar).

"Scientists, businessmen, statesmen--all have in common with students the need to master large amounts of reading. Perhaps one person needs to cut his reading time, another to read more in a given time. At Hofstra we are anxious to help students improve their reading skills, since we find this basic to all academic work, as well as to all professions and business careers. Next fall we will begin a special program to stimulate reading skills in a new way. We invite you to participate in this program as a part of your regular freshman academic work.

Advanced reading skills can be taught. But when they are taught, in our colleges and universities, they are generally taught in courses that are separated from the regular curriculum and that are taken mainly by students needing remedial work. Since good students can profit as much as poor students from reading instruction, and since students are naturally most interested in what immediately and directly pays off in their other work, we are developing a new idea. We plan to offer a reading course for freshmen in general, one that draws some of its instructional materials directly from another academic course being taken by the same students at the same time.

Hofstra's Reading Center, a national leader in the field, presently offers a one-semester course called Reading 1, which is optional except for some students with low-to-average reading skills.

RE 001 776

Our History Department teaches a two-semester course in the history of Western Civilization, History 1-2, which is required of all undergraduates. In 1967-68, members of the History Department and the Reading Center will begin a combined program, at first on a small scale: selected students will take History 1-2 and a special version of Reading 1 at the same time. They will be taught by members of the Reading and History faculty who are familiar with each other's work and in their Reading course they will receive direct help with their History assignments. For example, students will learn principles of note-taking in the Reading course by means of exercises based on the current assignments in the History textbook.

We need interested freshmen to help us develop this program, with a view to its eventual adoption as a general requirement in Hofstra's freshman year. In practical terms, we ask if you will ~~~~ take History 1-2 as a freshman (rather than taking it later on, or skipping it entirely). Each course carries full academic credit toward graduation; History 1-2, with two semesters of three credits each; Reading 1-H, with one semester of three credits. Tuition charges are proportioned to academic credits, as usual.

If you would like to participate in this History-Reading program, please let us know by returning the enclosed form by __(date)__. We are confident that all who volunteer will be helping themselves, as well as helping us to help others."

As a result of this letter, 130 students of a total freshmen class of 870 volunteered for the program. We could only accept 60 for our pilot study, 1967-68.

Professor Thorn's letter was the result of the close collaboration between the History Department and the Reading Center during the 1966-67 school year. Too frequently, the developmental or corrective reading program at the college level remains isolated from the liberal arts faculty. The Hofstra History-Reading

Program represented a meaningful, interdisciplinary effort, perhaps the first of its kind, to assist college freshmen in their reading of history. Most members of the faculty - and a good many students - had been aware of the reading problems facing the average freshman as he took the basic history course, History 1-2, "Western Civilization." Schleich and Rauch reported "It was apparent that many college freshmen - even those with above average scores on standardized reading tests - encountered serious difficulties with this particular course. Even the good student found himself in jeopardy at an early stage of his academic career because he could not deal adequately with the volume of reading material required"(2). The great majority of failures and subsequent "drop-outs" commented on the difficulty of keeping up with the basic and supplementary reading assignments. They just weren't prepared in terms of reading-study skills to cope with what they considered an "avalanche of materials."

To attack this problem and, hopefully, to solve it, the administration assigned two members of the History Department (Professors John Follows and Linton Thorn) and two members of the Reading Center faculty (Professors Miriam Schleich and Sidney J. Rauch). Each professor was given one-quarter released time during the 1966-67 school year to work on this project. In addition to two formal monthly meetings, the instructors sat in on one another's classes, took notes, taped lectures, evaluated the vocabulary difficulty and organization of basic history texts, and determined which basic reading skills should be emphasized. The history professors were responsible for the selection of basic vocabulary and concepts to be reinforced during the reading sections. Examination questions in history were discussed in advance so that the Reading instructors would have some idea of the content to be covered, and the expectations of the History instructors. Where possible, the program followed the principle expressed by Robinson, "If the skill is to be retained and used, it is best introduced and taught in the situation where it is immediately needed." (3)

Also provided by the History instructors were a précis of the main points and contents of the assigned supplementary reading. These followed the format suggested by Cantor and Schneider in How to Study History.(4)

In general, the purposes of the 1966-67 program were two-fold:

(1) to analyze the content and organization of the basic history course from the point of view of both instructor and student.

(2) on the basis of this analysis, to develop a combined History-Reading course designed to improve the reading-study skills of college freshmen as they learn the content of the history of Western Civilization.

The 1967 - 1968 Pilot Experimental Program

Thirty student volunteers were assigned to two sections of the experimental History-Reading course (Reading 1-H) for the Fall semester 1967, and thirty volunteers were scheduled for the Spring 1968 semester. This latter group was also used as controls in two other history sections during the first semester. All Reading 1-H sections were coordinated with sections of History 1 in the first semester and History 2 for the second semester. Thus, each History section contained thirty students, fifteen taking the experimental Reading course (combining reading skills with history content) and fifteen students taking history only. Achievement of both groups were measured by the Cooperative English Test C-2, Reading Comprehension, an informal History-Reading Inventory, and a comparison of History grades. A sample of the informal inventory follows:

Informal Textbook Test

(based on Chapter 36, "The Thirty Years War", of A History of Civilization)

I. Four minute preview of chapter (approximately 4000 words)

a. List important ideas and/or significant details obtained from preview. (6 min.)

b. After completing the above, take a few minutes to review the chapter and list those words or concepts whose meanings are unknown or unclear to you. (5 min.)

II. Prepare an outline on "The Effects of the Thirty Years War" (10 min.)

III. The author has supplied you with many "signals" in Chapter One. A signal is a key word or phrase used by the author to emphasize an important point or to direct the reader's attention to an important idea or concept. As you look through the chapter, see if you can find at least five important signals. Copy these on your paper. (5 min.)

IV. Supply a synonym or explanatory phrase for the underlined word. The page number is included so that you can use contextual clues where possible. (10 min.)

1. This plump and officious ruler was a religious enthusiast, one of the last militant champions of the almost extinct Catholic Reformation. (p. 376)

2. In 1618, during the early stages of the revolt, the rebels threw two of these Catholic councillors from a window 70 feet high - an incident known as the Defenestration of Prague. (p. 376)

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3. Neither side could muster enough strength for a decisive victory, and the war degenerated into one of attrition. (p.381)

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omit →

Harrowing accounts exist, much like those describing the Black Death of the fourteenth century, of wolves roaming through the deserted villages, while half-starved children hunted in packs through the fields and forests. (p.383)

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4. Some historians attribute the rise of despotism in Germany to the weakness of the middle classes. (p. 384)

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5. It also reveals the decline of religion and the rise of secularism as a guiding force in Western civilization. (p. 385)

(Note: Sentences 6-10 have been deleted because of space limitations)

Materials used in the History-Reading Experimental Course

Required history texts included the following:

Basic text: Gerrit P. Judd, A History of Civilization. (Macmillan)

Supplementary Readings: Francis M. Cornford, Before and After Socrates. (Cambridge University Press)

Roland Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century. (Beacon)

Lynn White, Jr., Medieval Technology and Social Change. (Oxford University Press)

Plato, The Last Days of Socrates. (Penguin)

Required Reading 1-H texts

Basic Text: Sidney J. Rauch and Alfred B. Weinstein, Mastering Reading Skills. (American Book Co.)

Supplementary Materials: EDL Controlled Reader and Study Guides.

J.E. Norwood, Concerning Words, 4th ed. (Prentice-Hall)

Special selections from Harpers, Atlantic, Saturday Review, and other journals.

Skills emphasized in the Reading 1-H sections were survey techniques (with particular application to chapters in Judd's text), paragraph analysis (using representative samples from the supplementary readings), use of signals and other cues, critical analysis and evaluation, analysis of the structure of texts and articles concentrating on such organizational patterns as "conclusion-proof" "problem-solution" "question-answer," and note-taking. An effective application of the last mentioned skill was to play the tape of a

history lecture in the Reading class with both the instructor and students taking notes. The instructor would place his notes on an opaque projector and the students would compare their efforts with his. The results were not always in favor of the instructor.

Results

The average gain on the Cooperative English Test C-2, Reading Comprehension, for those students taking Reading 1-H and History together was sixteen percentile points higher than those taking History alone. There was no significant difference on the final History grades, though more "A's" occurred among the History-Reading volunteers. However, the comments on the evaluation sheet submitted to the History-Reading testify to the value of the program. Space does not permit the complete copy of the evaluation form and the responses, but three of the key questions and responses included:

Student Comments (partial)

	Yes	No
1. Do you feel the experimental program was a wise investment of time for you?	48	7
2. Would you recommend this program to other freshmen?	50	5
3. Do you feel that as a result of this course your reading is more effective?	51	4

Conclusion

On the basis of the reaction of students and instructors involved, the program appears to have been a successful one. It has the full support of the university and is continuing for another year.

References

1. Linton Thorn, Letter addressed to incoming freshmen, May 1967, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York 11550.

2. Miriam Schleich and Sidney J. Rauch, "Combining a Program of Reading Improvement with the Study of History," Multidisciplinary Aspects of College-Adult Reading (Seventeenth Yearbook of the National Reading Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1968), pp. 35-40.

3. Robinson, H. Alan, "Corrective Reading in the High School Classroom: Some Principles and Procedures," Corrective Reading in the High School Classroom, Perspectives in Reading No. 6, H. Alan Robinson and Sidney J. Rauch (Eds.). Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1966, p. 12.

4. Richard I. Schneider and Norman Cantor, How to Study History (New York, 1967), pp. 114-116.